

The Brethren

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(Continued from Last Week)

"If this is to be so, time is short, Sir Godwin. What farewells have you to make? You say that you would speak with my niece Rosamund? Nay, the princess you shall not see, and indeed cannot, for she lies swooning in her chamber. Do you desire to meet your brother for the last time?"

"No, sire, for then he might learn the truth and—"

"Refuse this sacrifice, Sir Godwin, which perchance will be scarcely to his liking."

"I wish to say goodbye to Masouda, she who is waiting woman to the princess."

"That you cannot do, for know I mistrust this Masouda and believe that she was at the bottom of your plot. I have dismissed her from the person of the princess and from my camp, which she is to leave—if she has not already left—with some Arabs who are her kin."

"Then," said Godwin, with a sigh, "I desire only to see Egbert the bishop, that he may shrieve me according to our faith and make note of my last wishes."

"Good; he shall be sent to you. I accept your statement that you are the guilty man and not Sir Wulf and take your life for his. Leave me now, who have greater matters on my mind. The guard will seek you at the appointed time."

Godwin bowed and walked away with a steady step, while Saladin, looking after him, muttered:

"The world could ill spare so brave and good a man."

Two hours later guards summoned Godwin from the place where he was imprisoned, and, accompanied by the old bishop who had shrieved him, he passed his door with a happy countenance, such as a bridegroom might have worn. They took him to a vault of the great house where Saladin was lodged, a large, rough place, lit with torches, in which waited the headsman and his assistants. Presently Saladin entered, and, looking at him curiously, said:

"Are you still of the same mind, Sir Godwin?"

"I am."

"Good. Yet I have changed mine. You shall say farewell to your cousin, as you desired."

"Sire," pleaded Godwin, "spare her such a sight."

But he pleaded in vain. A while passed, and Godwin, hearing the sweep of robes, looked up and saw the tall shape of a veiled woman standing in the corner of the vault where the shadow was so deep that the torchlight only illumined faintly upon her royal ornaments.

"They told me that you were sick, princess, sick with sorrow, as well you may be, because the man you love was about to die for you," said Saladin in a low voice. "Now I have had pity on your grief, and his life has been bought with another life, that of the knight who stands yonder."

The veiled form started wildly, then sank back against the wall.

"Rosamund," broke in Godwin, speaking in French, "I beseech you, be silent and do not unman me with words or tears. It is best thus, and you know that it is best. Wulf will love as he loves you, and I believe that time you will be brought together."

"You do not love, save as a friend, and never have. Moreover, I tell you that it may ease your pain and my conscience. I no longer seek you as my wife, whose bride is death. I pray you, give to Wulf my love and blessing, and to Masouda, that truest and sweetest woman, say, or write, that I offer her the homage of my heart; that I thought of her in my last moments, and that my prayer is we may meet again where all crooked paths are straightened. Rosamund, farewell, and joy go with you through many years—aye, and with your children's children. Of Godwin I only ask you to remember this, that he lived loving you and so died."

She heard and stretched out her arms, and, none forbidding him, Godwin walked to where she stood. With lifting her veil she bent forward and kissed him, first upon the brow and next upon the lips, then with a low, moaning cry she turned and fled from that gloomy place, nor did Saladin seek to stay her. Only to himself the sultan wondered how it came about that it was Wulf whom Rosamund loved and still kissed Godwin thus upon the lips.

As he walked back to the death place Godwin wondered also, first that Rosamund should have spoken no single word, and secondly because she had kissed him thus, even in that hour, with a sigh, he knelt down before the

headsman and, turning to the bishop, said:

"Bless me, father, and bid them strike."

Then it was that he heard a well known footstep and looked up to see Wulf staring at him.

"What do you here, Godwin?" asked Wulf. "Has yonder fox snared both of us?" and he nodded at Saladin.

"Let the fox speak," said the sultan, with a smile. "Know, Sir Wulf, that your brother was about to die in your place and of his own wish. But I refuse such sacrifice who yet have made use of it to teach my niece, the princess, that should she continue in her plottings to escape or allow you to continue in them certainly it will bring you to your deaths and, if need be, her also. Knights, you are brave men whom I prefer to kill in war. Good horses stand without; take them as my gift and ride with these foolish citizens of Jerusalem. We may meet again within its streets. Nay, thank me not. I thank you who have taught Saladin how perfect a thing can be the love of brothers."

The brethren stood awhile bewildered, for it is a strange thing thus to come back from death to life. It was Wulf who spoke the first.

"A noble deed, Godwin. Sultan, we are grateful for your boon of life, though had you shed this innocent blood surely it would have stained your soul."

Outside that gloomy place of death their swords were given them and two good horses, which they mounted. Hence guides led them to the embassy from Jerusalem that was already in the saddle, who were very glad to welcome two such knights to their company. Then, having bid farewell to the bishop Egbert, who wept for joy at their escape, escorted for awhile by Saladin's soldiers, they rode away from Ascalon at the fall of night.

Soon they had told each other all there was to tell. When he heard of the woe of Rosamund, Wulf well might shed tears.

"We have our lives," he said, "but how shall we save her? While Masouda stayed with her there was some hope, but now I can see none."

"There is none except in God," answered Godwin, "who can do all things—even free Rosamund and make her your wife. Also, if Masouda is at liberty, we shall hear from her ere long. So let us keep a good heart."

But, though he spoke thus, the soul of Godwin was oppressed with a fear which he could not understand. It seemed as though some great terror came very close to him or to one who was near and dear. Deeper and deeper he sank into that pit of dread of he knew not what, until at length he could have cried aloud, and his brow was bathed with a sweat of anguish. Wulf saw his face in the moonlight and asked:

"What ails you, Godwin? Have you some secret wound?"

"Yes, brother," he answered, "a wound in my spirit. Ill fortune threatens us—great ill fortune."

"That is no new thing," said Wulf. "In this land of blood and sorrows. Let us meet it as we have met the rest."

"Alas, brother," exclaimed Godwin, "I fear that Rosamund is in sore danger—Rosamund or another?"

"Then," answered Wulf, turning pale, "since we cannot, let us pray that some angel may deliver her."

"Aye," said Godwin, and as they rode through the desert sands beneath the silent stars they prayed to the Blessed Mother and to their saints, St. Peter and St. Chad—prayed with all their strength.

The dawn was breaking, and at its first sign the escort of Saladin's soldiers had turned and left them. All night they had ridden fast and far. The plain was behind them, and their road ran among hills. Suddenly it turned and in the flaming lights of the newborn day showed them a sight so beautiful that for a moment all that little company drew rein to gaze, for yonder before them, though far away as yet, throned upon her hills, stood the holy city of Jerusalem.

Saladin had offered to spare the citizens if they consented to surrender, but they would not. This embassy had told him that they had sworn to perish with the holy places, and now, looking at it in its splendor, they knew that the hour was near and groaned aloud.

Godwin groaned also, but not for Jerusalem. Oh, now the last terror was upon him! Blackness surged round him, and in the blackness swords and a sound as of a woman's voice murmuring his name. Suddenly the anguish passed. A strange wind seemed to blow about him and lift his hair, a deep, unearthly peace sank into his spirit; the world seemed far away and heaven very near.

"It is over," he said to Wulf. "I fear that Rosamund is dead."

"If so, we must make haste to follow her," answered Wulf, with a sob.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT the village of Bittir, some seven miles from Jerusalem, the embassy dismounted to rest; then again they pressed forward down the valley in the hope

of reaching the Zion gate before the midday heat was upon them. At the end of this valley swelled the shoulder of a hill, whence the eye could command its length, and on the crest of that shoulder appeared suddenly a man and a woman, seated on beautiful horses. The company halted, fearing lest these might herald some attack and that the woman was a man disguised to deceive them. Wulf looked at them curiously and said to Godwin:

"Almost could I think that those two horses were Flame and Smoke reborn. Note their whirlwind pace and strength and stride."

Almost as he finished speaking the strangers pulled up their steeds in front of the company, to whom the man bowed his salutations. Then Godwin saw his face and knew him at once as the old Arab called, Son of the Sand, who had given them the horses Flame and Smoke.

"Sir," said the Arab to the leader of the embassy, "I have come to ask a favor of yonder knights. This woman"—and he pointed to the closely veiled shape of his companion—"is a relative of mine whom I desire to deliver to friends in Jerusalem, but dare not do so myself because the hill dwellers between here and there are hostile to my tribe. She is of the Christian faith and no spy, but cannot speak your language. Within the south gate she will be met by her relatives. I have spoken."

"Surely we will take her," said Godwin, "though what we shall do with her if her friends are wanting I do not know. Come, lady, ride between us."

She turned her head to the Arab as though in question, and he repeated the words, whereon she fell into the place that was shown to her between and a little behind the brethren.

"Still, if so, I pray you of your knightly courtesy," went on the Arab to Godwin, "disturb not this woman with your words nor ask her to unveil her face, since such is not the custom of her people. It is but an hour's journey to the city gate, during which you will be troubled with her. This is the payment that I ask of you for the two good horses Flame and Smoke."

"It shall be as you wish," said Godwin, "and, Son of the Sand, we thank you for those horses."

"Good. When you want more let it be known in the market places that you seek me." And he began to turn his horse's head.

"Stay," said Godwin. "What do you know of Masouda, your niece? Is she with you?"

"Nay," answered the Arab in a low voice, "but she bade me be in a certain garden of which you have heard, near Ascalon, at an appointed hour to take her away, as she is leaving the camp of Salah-ed-din. So thither I go. Farewell." Then with a reverence to the veiled lady he shook his reins and departed like an arrow.

Godwin gave a sigh of relief. If Masouda had appointed to meet her uncle, the Arab, at least she must be safe. Then he looked up to find Wulf staring back at the woman behind him and reproved him, saying that he must keep to the spirit of the bargain as well as to the letter, and that if he might not speak he must not look either.

"That is a pity," answered Wulf. "For though she is so tied up, she must be a tall and noble lady by the way she sits her horse. The horse, too, is noble, own cousin or brother to Smoke. I think. Perhaps she will sell it when we get to Jerusalem."

Then they rode on and reached the gate of Jerusalem, which was crowded with folk awaiting the return of their ambassadors. They all passed through, and the embassy was escorted thence by the chief people, most of the multitude following them to know if they brought peace or war.

Now Godwin and Wulf stared at each other, wondering whether they were to go and where to find the relatives of their veiled companion, of whom they saw nothing. Out of the street opened an archway, and beyond this archway was a garden, which seemed to be deserted. They rode into it to take counsel.

"Jerusalem is reached, and we must speak to her now," said Wulf, "if only to ask her whither she wishes to be taken."

Godwin nodded, and they wheeled their horses round.

"Lady," he said in Arabic, "we have fulfilled our charge. Be pleased to tell us where are those kindred to whom we must lead you."

"Here," answered a soft voice.

Then the lady let slip her cloak, though not her veil, revealing the robe beneath.

"By St. Peter!" said Godwin. "I know the brotherhood on that dress. Masouda! Say, is it you, Masouda?"

As he spoke the veil fell also, and lo! before them was a woman like to Masouda and yet not Masouda. The hair was dressed like hers, the ornaments and the necklace made of the claws of the lion which Godwin killed were hers, the skin was of the same rich hue, there even was the tiny mole upon her cheek, but as the head was bent they could not see her eyes. Suddenly, with a little moan, she lifted it and looked at them.

"Rosamund! It is Rosamund herself!" gasped Wulf. "Rosamund disguised as Masouda!" And he fell rather than leaped from his saddle and ran to her, murmuring, "God, I thank thee!"

Now she seemed to faint and slid from her horse into his arms and lay there a moment.

"Yes," said Rosamund, freeing herself, "it is I and no other, yet I rode with you all this way and neither of you knew me."

"Have we eyes that we can pierce veils and woolen garments?" asked Wulf indignantly, but Godwin said in a strange, strained voice:

"You are Rosamund disguised as Masouda. Who, then, was that woman to whom I bade farewell before Saladin while the headsman awaited me—a veiled woman who wore the robes and gems of Rosamund?"

"I know not, Godwin," she answered, "unless it were Masouda clad in my garments as I left her. Nor do I know anything of this story of the headsman who awaited you. I thought—I thought it was for Wulf that he waited—oh, heaven, I thought that."

"Tell us your tale," said Godwin hoarsely.

"It is short," she answered. "After the casting of the lot, of which I shall dream to my death day, I fainted. When I found my senses again I thought that I must be mad, for there before me stood a woman dressed in my garments, whose face seemed like my face, yet not the same."

"Have no fear," she said. "I am Masouda, who, among many other things, have learned how to play a part. Listen. There is no time to lose. I have been ordered to leave the camp. Even now my uncle the Arab waits without with two swift horses. You, princess, will leave in my place. Look, you wear my robes and my face almost and are of my height, and the man who guides you will know no difference. I have seen to that, for, although a soldier of Salah-ed-din, he is of my tribe. I will go with you to the door and there bid you farewell before the eunuchs and the guards with weeping, and who will guess that Masouda is the Princess of Baalbec and that the Princess of Baalbec is Masouda?"

"And whither shall I go?" asked.

"My uncle, Son of the Sand, will give you over to the embassy which

rides to Jerusalem or, failing that, will take you to the city or, failing that, will hide you in the mountains among his own people. See, here is a letter that he must read. I place it in your breast."

"And what of you, Masouda?" I asked again.

"Of me? Oh, it is all planned, a plan that cannot fail," she answered. "Fear not; I escape tonight—I have no time to tell you how—and will join you in a day or two; also I think that you will find Sir Godwin, who will bring you home to England."

"But Wulf? What of Wulf?" I asked again. "He is doomed to die, and I will not leave him."

"The living and the dead can keep no company," she answered. "More—"



She slid from her horse into his arms. Over, I have seen him, and all this is done by his most urgent order. If you love him, he bids that you will obey."

"I never saw Masouda! I never spoke such words! I knew nothing of this plot!" exclaimed Wulf, and the brethren looked at each other with white faces.

"Speak on," said Godwin. "Afterward we can debate."

"Moreover," continued Rosamund, bowing her head, "Masouda added these words: 'I think that Sir Wulf will escape his doom. If you would see him again, obey his word, for unless you obey you can never hope to look upon him living. Go, now, before we are both discovered, which would mean your death and mine, who, if you go, am safe.'"

"How knew she that I should escape?" asked Wulf.

"She did not know it. She only said she knew to force Rosamund away," answered Godwin in the same strained voice. "And then?"

"And then—oh—having Wulf's ex-

press commands, then I went, like one in a dream. I remember little of it. At the door we kissed and parted weeping, and while the guard bowed before me she blessed me beneath her breath. A soldier stepped forward and said, 'Follow me, daughter of Sinan,' and I followed him."

"We came to a place where was an old Arab among some trees, and with him two led horses. The soldier spoke to the Arab, and I gave him Masouda's letter, which he read. Then he put me on one of the led horses and the soldier mounted the other, and we departed at a gallop. All that evening and last night we rode hard, but in the darkness the soldier left us, and I do not know whither he went. At length we came to that mountain shoulder and waited there, resting the horses and eating food which the Arab had with him, till we saw the embassy, and among them two tall knights."

"See," said the old Arab, 'yonder come the brethren whom you seek. See and give thanks to Allah and to Masouda, who has not lied to you and to whom I must now return.'"

"Oh, my heart wept as though it would burst, and I wept in my joy—wept and blessed God and Masouda. But the Arab, Son of the Sand, told me that for my life's sake I must be silent and keep myself close veiled and disguised even from you until we reached Jerusalem, lest perhaps if they knew me the embassy might refuse escort to the Princess of Baalbec and niece of Saladin."

"Then I promised and asked, 'What of Masouda?' He said that he rode back at speed to save her also, as had been arranged, and that was why he did not take me to Jerusalem himself. But how that was to be done he was not sure as yet. And—and—you know the rest, and here, by the grace of God, we three are together again."

"Aye," said Godwin, "but where is Masouda and what will happen to her who has dared to venture such a plot as this? Hark you, Wulf. Take Rosamund and lodge her with some lady in this city, or, better still, place her in sanctuary with the nuns of the Holy Cross, whence none will dare to drag her, and let her don their habit."

"Yes, yes, but you? Where do you go, Godwin?" said his brother.

"I? I ride back to Ascalon to find Masouda. For the sake of Rosamund and perhaps for my sake also Masouda has run a fearful risk. Beshink you what will be the mood of Saladin when at length he finds that she upon whom he had built such hopes has gone. She may have given her life to set Rosamund free to join us in Jerusalem."

Rosamund looked at Godwin, and Godwin looked at Rosamund, and there was understanding in their eyes, for now both of them saw the truth in all its glory and all its horror.

"I think that I should go back also," said Rosamund.

"That shall not be," answered Wulf. "Saladin would kill you for this flight, as he has sworn."

"That cannot be," added Godwin. "Shall the sacrifice of blood be offered in vain? Moreover, it is our duty to prevent you. Rosamund, I know not what has chanced. I go to sea. Through life, through death, I ride on till I find Masouda and kneel to her in homage!"

"And in love," exclaimed Rosamund. "Mayhap," Godwin answered, speaking more to himself than to her.

"Farewell, my liege lady and cousin Rosamund," Godwin said. "My part is played. Now I leave you in the keeping of God in heaven and of Wulf on earth. Should we meet no more my counsel is that you two wed here in Jerusalem and travel back to Steeple, there to live in peace if it may be so. Brother Wulf, fare you well also. We part today for the first time who from our birth have lived together and loved together and done many a deed together, some of which we can look back upon without shame."

"Oh, Godwin," said Wulf, "we do not part thus easily. Our lady here will be safe enough among the nuns—more safe than I can keep her. Give me an hour, and I will set her there and join you. Both of us owe a debt to Masouda, and it is not right that it should be paid by you alone."

"Nay," answered Godwin, "look upon Rosamund and think what is about to befall this city. Can you leave her at such a time?"

Then Wulf dropped his head, and, trusting himself to speak no more words, Godwin mounted his horse and without so much as looking back rode into the narrow street and out through the gateway till presently he was lost in the distance and the desert.

Wulf and Rosamund watched him go in silence, for they were choked with tears.

(To be Continued)

A Menace to Health.

Kidney trouble is an insidious danger, and many people are victims of a serious malady before the symptoms are recognized. Foley's Kidney Cure cures all irregularities and strengthens and builds up the kidneys, and it should be taken at the first indication of kidney trouble, as it is impossible to have good health if the kidneys are deranged. Sold by Ed Greene.